

Supplementary written evidence from PeoplePlus

Are there currently any differences in the provision of education services offered in women's and men's prisons. If there is, should there be?

For core curriculum subjects (such as English or Maths), the content is standardised and there is no difference between female or male provision offered. There are however, two main differences in terms of our approach which ensure that the provision we offer, and our methods for delivering that provision, reflect the different needs of female versus male prisoners. This is important – because 5% of the prison population are female, the support provision tends to be profiled around the needs of male prisoners.

A high proportion of women in prison (over 50% according to Prison Reform Trust) report they have experienced domestic violence. We use a trauma informed approach for prisoners where it is needed, regardless of gender, however women in prisons are most likely to have been victims as well as offenders and therefore this approach is particularly effective. Often, we are working to manage the impacts of domestic violence experiences, such as brain injuries and mental health problems. Increasingly, we find that support is required to enable female recovery from a toxic mix of domestic violence and coercive control.

In women's prisons therefore, a key difference is that there is greater emphasis on trauma informed services which help the individual to overcome their barriers to engagement and progression. Staff are trained to adjust their behaviour to allow the women to manage symptoms so that they are then able to access and benefit from education provision.

Secondly, our courses also reflect the fact that many of the women have dependent children (according to the Prison Reform Trust around 17,000 children are impacted by maternal incarceration every year). Women often have a particular requirement for roles that allow flexibility to allow for childcare commitments.

We have heard that qualifications at level 3 or above are scarce. What are you doing to address this?

We agree wholeheartedly that higher qualifications are an important aspect of prison education provision.

An important principle underpinning our approach to prisoner learning is to ensure each and every individual has the confidence and ability to progress their learning at their own pace, building self-esteem and importantly, ensuring they are ready for ROTL opportunities that will allow for sustainable work and progression. For prisoners serving longer sentences, we are committed to supporting level 3 + awards. We deliver level 3 awards in education and training through PEF, as well as delivering Food Safety and ICT qualifications and supporting prisoners who opt for Open University qualifications. For prisoners who have struggled in education, we help them address barriers to learning, so that they are able to

progress through level 1 and level 2 and aspire to higher level qualifications and/or work that isn't simply 'lowest paid' but allows for progression and fulfilment.

However, there are factors that inhibit the number of level 3 + qualifications undertaken and completed across the criminal justice system - such as sentence length and the opportunity to progress learners so they are ready to undertake a higher-level qualification. We do believe that there is scope to extend qualifications at level 3 and beyond. To that end, our aspiration is to work with colleges and universities to enhance the opportunities available. We would welcome an opportunity to participate in further conversations on level 3 + qualifications to support an enhancement of that provision right across the justice system.

How can Government ensure that educational achievements of offenders are recorded as they move across the prison estate and that they are recognised once released?

We believe this does happen through the Government's 'Curious' database. Qualifications are recognised on release as the qualifications are accredited and delivered through quality-checked providers.

How would better data collection on prisoner destination help improve your services?

Better data on prisoner destination would help us refine our education and Information and Guidance (IAG) offer to support the vocations and careers that ex-offenders are pursuing.

Moreover, it would allow us to identify those sectors that are less open to recruiting from an ex-offender cohort. As an education provider that actively advocates across its employer base, we can tap into thousands of employers through our own client base and that of our sister company, Staffline Group. By focusing our advocacy efforts on companies in sectors that are yet to understand the benefits of employing from this cohort, we can drive a change in attitudes, widening the types of jobs and the level of opportunity available to support positive outcomes for prisoners leaving custody

To improve data around destinations, we do believe that there needs to be greater clarity regarding responsibility for ex-offenders in the first year following release would ensure prisoners do not fall 'off the radar' and that they are supported through a critical period post release. A range of organisations have the potential to be involved in supporting the individual in the first year after year release including DWP, probation service etc. If the prison service retained accountability for tracking that person (monitoring whether they are paying tax, supported through probation services for example) it would enable seamless support and minimise the risk of re-offending. This could be done by funding dedicated staff within the prison service who monitor track and are able to sign-post to effective support where necessary.

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